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Some Guiding Principles
of
Group-Centered Leadership and Administration

Introduction

Group-centered leadership simply stated means that groups of
employees having similar duties and responsibilities and common
objectives are afforded an opportunity to have maximum participa-
tion in arriving at decisions which will affect them in the performance
of their duties.

This concept has been developed as opposed to what may be termed
"employer-centered leadership," where most of the major decisions are
made by the supervisor with a very minimum if any participation on the
part of employees affected.

Many of the techniques used in group-centered leadership are similar to
those used by a good conference leader in conducting a formal group
discussion on a specific subject. However, the group-centered leader
as an administrator is much more than an impartial conference leader
who may conduct a successful group conference and "then silently steal
away."

As an administrator the successful group-centered leader uses group-
centered principles in his day-to-day contacts with employees under
his supervision and in many very informal situations. He is continuously
setting the stage for his employees in problem-sharing experiences. He
encourages participation and assists employees in building up self-
confidence in making decisions concerning their work.

Within recent years there has been a considerable shift in emphasis
in the field of administration from the old "boss type" of supervision
to one that permits employees much greater participation in arriving
at decisions which will affect them. In recent literature, articles
and discussions on this subject a number of terms are used to describe
this new concept. Among others are "employee-centered supervision,"
"employee participation programs," "problem-sharing supervision,"
"non-directive supervision," and "group-centered leadership and
administration."

Perhaps the latter term is a bit more expressive of the fundamental idea than some of the others, and ties in more closely with the actual day-to-day administration of a program.

I. Some Characteristics of "Employer-Centered" or "Boss-Centered" Leader

Administrative philosophy may be based on power, or it may be built around the concept of teamwork - either one or the other; you cannot have both at the same time.

Consider the following list of administrative concepts, consisting as it does of actual statements made by various individuals in industry at one time or another:

1. A good leader does not let the workers do what they want to. He should make the decisions and give his recommendations and then check up to see that they are being followed.

2. A leader should provide a specific program of action with a dead-line.

3. A leader who lacks power and authority, or having power and authority fails to exercise them, is inefficient.

4. A leader must maintain control of his workers and thus maintain respect.

5. No leader can admit a mistake either to subordinates or to superiors without weakening his own power and authority.

6. Giving approval to a subordinate's suggestion constitutes a threat to a superior's position.

7. When people refuse to cooperate, a good leader should put them in their place by taking a firm attitude toward them. This will convince them of the futility of their absurd stand.

8. By resisting changes, the leader will be able to preserve his status.

II. Some Characteristics of a Group-Centered Leader

The group-centered leader believes in the worth of the members of the group and respects them as individuals different from himself. They are not persons to be used, influenced or directed in order to accomplish the leader's aims. They are not people to be "led" by someone who has "superior" qualities or more important values. The group-centered leader sees the group or organization as existing for the individuals who compose it. He believes that the group as a whole can provide for itself better than can any single member of the group. In examining the attitudes which he feels he must have as an administrator, he asks himself certain questions:

1. Do I trust the capacities of the group and of the individuals in the group, to meet the problems with which we are faced, or do I basically trust only myself?

2. Do I free the group for creative discussion by being willing to understand, accept, and respect all attitudes, or do I find myself trying subtly to manipulate group discussion so that it comes out my way?

3. Do I, as leader, participate by honest expression of my own attitudes but without trying to control the attitudes of others?

4. Do I rely upon basic attitudes for motivation, or do I think surface procedures motivate behavior?

5. Am I willing to be responsible for those aspects of action which the group has delegated to me?

6. Do I trust the individual to do his job?

7. When tensions occur, do I try to make it possible for them to be brought out into the open?

III. Some Characteristics of Group Behavior in Problem-Sharing

1. A group is defined as two or more persons who have some common relationship to each other; or a group is made up of persons whose behavior has direct influence upon the behavior of other members through the medium of problem-sharing.

2. A group demonstrates during some specific time a period of some degree of instability. The group then is a dynamic system of forces. Changes in any part of the group may produce changes in the group as a whole.

3. Group behavior which serves to reduce the instability produced by changes within the group may be described as adjustment capacity. This is a fact we all recognize. Scapegoating, repression of feelings, blaming the leaders, withdrawing, are familiar examples of what takes place in group discussions. Through problem-sharing the group tends to reduce instability.

4. The group's ability to adjust itself will be most apparent when the group utilizes the maximum resources of its total membership. This means maximum participation of all group members, each making his most effective contribution.

5. A group has within itself the capacity to bring about adjustments which will achieve a greater degree of internal harmony. In other words, a group may not be able to solve immediately an existing problem, yet it can and will develop in a direction which will lead to the best solution of that problem . . . provided there has been real problem-sharing experiences.

IV. <u>Conditions Which the Group-Centered Leader Tries to Create</u>

1. <u>The Opportunity for Participation</u>

. . . Group problems require group decisions and group action.
For a group to move toward its maximum potential, the members
of the group must feel that they have at least the opportunity
to participate in matters which affect them.

2. <u>Freedom of Communication</u>

He attempts to create the absence of any barriers to free
communications between all members of the group. In most
organizations this condition is seldom met. Problems cannot be
shared unless there is absolute freedom of communication.

3. <u>A Non-Threatening Psychological Climate</u>

. . . The group members feel they are in a "safe" atmosphere.
They feel that they are not being judged or evaluated. They
feel that they are being understood. That the leader is
listening carefully and understanding what they are saying.
They feel "accepted." In this situation they feel free from
outside pressures to change.

4. <u>Conveying Warmth and Understanding</u>

These characteristics of a leader are difficult to describe,
but apparently are easy for people to perceive in a leader.
The general emotional tone of an entire group is often in-
fluenced by the presence or absence of these qualities. He
must exemplify the importance of problem-sharing experiences.

5. <u>Attending to Others</u>

In working with groups it has been sobering to observe how
<u>little others</u> attend to what others say. How do groups acquire
the practice of attending carefully to each other? Here it
seems the group-centered leader serves an essential and signi-
ficant function. He demonstrates an extraordinary kind of
concentrated attention. Having no need to get his own ideas
across, having no "axe" to grind, and sincerely respecting the
worth of the contributions of every group member, he is able to
attend to others. By doing so he conveys to the speaker that
his contribution is worth listening to, that as a person he is
respected enough to receive the undivided attention of another.

6. <u>Understanding Meanings and Intents</u>

It is not enough that the group-centered leader attends to
what others say and gives proof of this by reflecting back
to the other members of the group. It might be enough,

provided people said what they actually meant. We know people
seldom do this because of the limitations of language and
inhibitions, which protect the individual from threat. The
leader tries to understand the actual meaning of the intent
of the members' comments. That is, the leader tries to
place himself in the role of the other person.

7. Conveying Acceptance

The extent to which the leader can convey acceptance of others
is a critical requirement of group-centered leadership. He
must be willing to accept the group where it is at the moment,
even though this might mean that the group has no clearcut
goals. It means that the group-centered leader must convey
a genuine acceptance of what the group members wish to discuss,
what they decide to do, and how they plan to do it.

8. The "Linking" Function

The group-centered leader must assist the members in "bridging
the gap" as between the several trends of thought that develop.
The "linking" function of the group-centered leader is related
closely to his function of understanding meanings and intents
(No. 6). Thus by clarifying the meaning or intent of a
comment the group-centered leader makes clear to the group
how each new contribution blends into the previous discussion.
As with other distinctive functions which the group-centered
leader brings to the group, this linking function is gradually
assumed by the members themselves.

9. Verification

The good group-centered leader in a sense "works himself out
of a job" by having the group verify tentative conclusions
reached as of now. This summary should be made for the benefit
of the whole group. It should be accepted by them as a "pro-
gressive or growing pattern" and guide, until other sessions
are held to further explore and re-examine the tentative conclusions.

V. Some Guiding Principles on Employee-Centered Counseling on Specific
Problems

There will be times when the administrator must counsel with individuals
or small groups on very specific official or personal problems. These
problems will not ordinarily fall within the scope of a regular staff
meeting or working conference. Very often they are intimate or con-
fidential in nature. In such sessions whether conducted with the
individual or in small groups, the same principles of group-centered
leadership apply. The administrator in the role of a counselor should
be guided by the following employee-centered principles:

1. Secure acceptance on the part of employee that the Supervisor is sympathetic. Acceptance on part of Supervisor of the employee as is, or as he stands revealed.

2. All decisions, evaluations, condemnations, etc., are to be made by the employee - not by the Supervisor directly. Hence, the term "employee-centered." This is the most important key in that it eventually leads to the employee solving his own problem or improving his situation.

3. The Supervisor must at all times attempt to think of the problem in the same terms that the employee is thinking.

4. All statements, suggestions, questions, alternative proposals on the part of the Supervisor must be skillfully directed toward attaining 1, 2 and 3.

5. It may be necessary in a few instances to set a limit of how far the Supervisor will go along with the attitudes or actions of the employee without destroying No. 1, Acceptance. Under no circumstances are such limits to be set at the beginning of the interview, or it's all over.

How Employee-Centered Counseling Helps

1. The employee "talks out" his problem with a sympathetic listener, with no fear of reprisals or judgments being passed on him one way or another.

2. He has an opportunity to "talk to himself" without appearing ridiculous. He makes evaluations, discusses alternative courses of action, as they occur to him, without too much direct guidance. As he unravels his problem with the help of the Supervisor, he begins to realize that he is primarily "working on himself" and that the decisions leading to solution of his problem are being made by him, which increases his self-confidence and reduces his tension or anxiety. He simply feels better, and admits it. His subsequent behavior usually reflects an improvement. This improvement involves a subtle and complex psychological process which is not easily explained, but can nevertheless be accepted as fact.

Application of Group-Centered Counseling in Small Groups

1. Group-centered counseling is effective with small groups (preferably not over six or seven).

2. Each member of the group throws his problem into the "pot." These problems are tossed back and forth between members by the leader.

3. Gradually there will develop a basic theme or themes common
    to the group.

4. Whether each member of the group reaches a decision on his
    particular problem or not, he feels that he has benefited by the
    joint participation. His problem may vanish completely or a
    clearcut solution may appear without his being able to tell
    exactly when or how.

1. Client-Centered Therapy - Rogers, et al

2. Getting Things Done in Business - Edward C.
    Bursk